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LETTER DATED 2 JANUARY 1998 FROM THE CHARGÉ D'AFFAIRES A.I.
OF THE PERMANENT MISSION OF ERITREA TO THE UNITED NATIONS
ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

Upon instructions from my Government, I have the honour to transmit herewith a statement of the Government of Eritrea on the reconciliation efforts in Somalia, issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Eritrea on 30 December 1997.

I should be grateful if you would kindly circulate the text of the present letter and its annex as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Tesfa Alem SEYOUM
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

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Annex

Statement of the Government of Eritrea on the reconciliation efforts in Somalia, issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Eritrea on 30 December 1997

The painful turmoil that has enveloped Somalia for the past seven years has remained a cause of extreme preoccupation to the friends and well-wishers of the Somali people. For the Government and people of Eritrea, the historical ties of solidarity and mutual respect with their Somali brothers that were cultivated during the armed struggle for liberation were additional reasons for propelling them to play an active role in the subregional efforts to facilitate the timely resolution of the tragic conflict from the early days of its eruption.

The Government of Eritrea was, as a matter of fact, consistently critical of the United States-led international intervention in December 1992 for its obvious inadequacies, and particularly for its short-termism and undue military focus. In the course of the subsequent months, the endeavour was derailed from its original objectives and purposes owing to complications arising from the misguided approach by the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM) and the Office of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The Government of Eritrea then strongly opposed and vehemently protested against the disorientation of the original initiative, which was now overshadowed by the singular punitive objective against General Aideed, rightly arguing that the elusive manhunt would entail unnecessary civilian casualties, alienate an entire clan and erode international support for the intervention.

Against the backdrop of these negative experiences and after some time had elapsed without any visible progress on the Somali ground, the Federal Republic of Ethiopia took the initiative of bringing together several Somali political groups in Sodere in November 1996. This was in accordance with the mandate given to it by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) as well as the Organization of African Unity (OAU), and represented, in this respect, a collective subregional endeavour. The Government of Eritrea naturally welcomed the new reconciliation effort. However, it expressed its reservations through the appropriate channels, including at the IGAD summits, underlining the imperative of ensuring the full participation of the movements led by Hussein Aideed and others in the Sodere peace process.

An endeavour has been undertaken in the past month by the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt to promote reconciliation among the Somali factions. Unfortunately, this latest round of negotiations has not brought about the desired consolidation of the process of building consensus and reconciliation among the key Somali protagonists.

In the circumstances, the Government of Eritrea wishes to reiterate its long-held views regarding efforts aimed at promoting peace and reconciliation in Somalia:

(a) Any endeavour must take into account the complexity and sensitivity of the Somali crisis;

(b) The endeavours that result inadvertently or wilfully in the exclusion of one party or another, or that appear to tip the delicate balance in favour of one faction at the perceived expense of the other, will not succeed in bringing about the desired peace and reconciliation. These well-intentioned efforts may in fact induce more internecine hostility and conflict;

(c) It must be realized that the problem in Somalia can only be resolved by the Somali people themselves. In this respect, no international or subregional initiative can serve as a substitute for this fundamental requirement. The immediate neighbours of the Somalis in the subregion as well as its friends elsewhere can evidently facilitate the difficult and protracted process of reconciliation and confidence-building when expressly asked to do so by the main protagonists. Maximum care must however be taken to ensure that this catalytic role does not exceed its bounds.

Finally, in urging our Somali brothers to exhibit the necessary courage and wisdom to bring this harrowing tragedy to an end, the Government of Eritrea expresses its readiness, as ever, to contribute to the reconciliation process together with its partners in the region.